

Oak Park and River Forest High School

Sept. 11, 2020

Results of Thoughtexchange:

“What is working well and what could we do better to build connections between you and your teachers and classmates?”

Thoughtexchange is a unique opinion research tool that allows users “to hear from the unheard majority,” as Thoughtexchange puts it. Exchange participants are asked to anonymously respond to an open-ended question, as well as review and rank at least 30 responses from other participants. Participants can revisit the survey as many times as they like before it closes. The Thoughtexchange algorithm shuffles the thoughts that each participant sees, so that the number of rankings per thought is as equal as possible, regardless of when the thought was submitted.

For this Thoughtexchange, which was open from Aug. 31 through Sept. 3, 2020, students were asked to respond to the following question: *“What is working well and what could we do better to build connections between you and your teachers and classmates?”*

RESULTS

Demographics

Participation in the Thoughtexchange was as follows:

- Total number of participants: 564 (17% of the student body)
- Number of thoughts shared: 556
- Number of ratings given to thoughts: 12,833

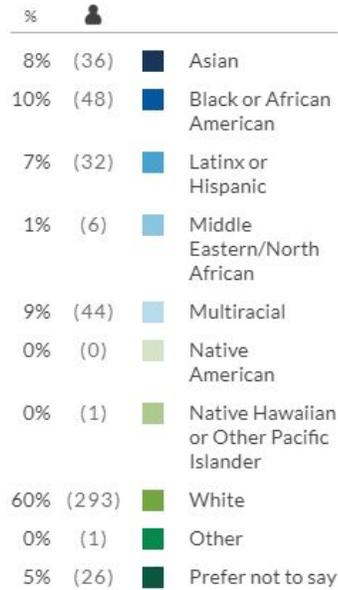
We requested that participants answer three demographic questions, with the results as follows.

1. What year are you?

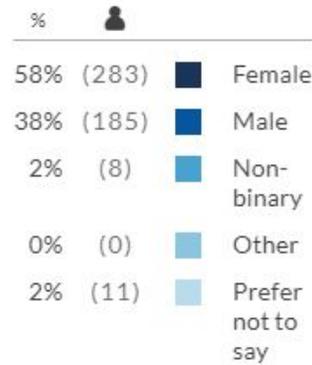


%	Person Icon	
27%	(131)	Freshman
23%	(111)	Sophomore
23%	(115)	Junior
27%	(131)	Senior

2. How do you self-identify?



3. How do you self-identify?



Themes that emerged

Here are the top three themes that emerged, along with the three top-ranked thoughts within each theme:

Pronouns

1. **Respect pronouns, please.** Teachers need to respect pronouns, and be reprimanded when they don't. It's one thing to accidentally do it, and another to continuously not use them.
2. **Teachers need to respect pronouns.** I'm non-binary and use they/them pronouns. I put my pronouns in my zoom name, but teachers still ignore it and use incorrect pronouns. Please fix this.

3. **Respect people's pronouns.** I have many friends who don't identify as male or female and they are telling me that even though they put their pronouns in their name their teachers are *[thought ends here]*.

Advisory

1. **Get rid of advisory.** While I can see where you guys are coming from with the concept, it's useless and makes us wake up earlier. Literally get rid of it. Please.
2. **Cancel Advisory.** I literally have to wake up earlier for 10 minutes of watching mindfulness videos. do u think i'd rather do that than sleep in.
3. **Get rid of advisory.** There is no point to it, all we do is watch a video and that's it.

Homework

1. **Don't assign homework on "off days."** Some teachers are now assigning double the homework because there are multiple days between classes. This is extremely stressful for students.
2. **I understand homework is important but it's getting excessive.** Teachers need to remember we are learning to balance 6 other classes (as well as non school things) more than even before.
3. **Homework.** This is already a stressful enough time as it is, giving even more homework than normal is gonna cause anxiety in students or promote them not doing it.

Hot topics

You can view all 517 thoughts in rank order by [clicking here](#). Following are 15 highly rated thoughts on different topics:

- **Don't assign homework on "off days."** Some teachers are now assigning double the homework because there are multiple days between classes. This is extremely stressful for students.
- **Parents deciding school decisions.** I think school decisions should be more student-involved rather than parent-involved. Parents aren't the ones taking classes in a pandemic. We are.
- **Teachers need to respect pronouns.** I'm non-binary and use they/them pronouns. I put my pronouns in my Zoom name, but teachers still ignore it and use incorrect pronouns. Please fix this.
- **I do like the A B schedule because everything feels more spaced out which is nice.**
- **Get rid of advisory.** While I can see where you guys are coming with the concept, it's useless and makes us wake up earlier. Literally get rid of it. Please.
- **I like when teachers have us get on a zoom call for 20-30 minutes and then send us off to do homework or asynchronous work while they stay on the call.** This is important because it gets hard to sit on a zoom call for the entire hour, then after that you still have even more homework on the computer
- **The breakout rooms are always awkward. I think if teachers really wanted us to do breakout rooms, maybe they should put us in groups that we stay with** for a few weeks because we would be able to develop better connections and maybe people would actually feel comfortable talking.
- **Try more things like peardecks and kahoots!** It helps students+teachers connect with each other and be fun at the same time!
- **I like the asynchronous work.** I think it's important to be able to work at your own pace (and not feel like you're being watched).

- **Work becomes overwhelming very quickly.** Work for all of my classes start piling up very quickly and take a long amount of time to do it. It is so easy to feel burnt-out.
- **I think having A days and B days works well, having breaks between each class is nice.**
- **Have specific breakout groups in classes for a week or two.** We can get to know and work with a small group of people for a while instead of a new group every time. It'll make the class feel closer.
- **I think that zoom is working well and better then google meets.** This is important because we are in this new environment we need to learn which works best.
- **My chromebook has not been working very well with zoom. It keeps breaking up my calls and nobody can hear me.** This is important because the one connection that I have with teachers and classmates is through zoom, and it's hard to build a relationship like this.
- **Technology issues make zoom classes difficult.** A lot of people have issues with their audio including myself and It always breaks up and lags when I try to talk.

Disaggregated results

We filtered results by the various demographics we collected: grade, race/ethnicity, and gender identity. Disaggregated results largely aligned with the overall results, with the exception of the following, which were among top-rated thoughts shared by students who identify as Black or African American:

- **The school wants to talk about promoting equity and yet e-learning is intrinsically detrimental to that agenda. E-learning is dependent on access to tech,** a stable internet connection, and privacy. Not every student has access to these. If you want to promote equity, then actually do something.
- **There needs to be reform at oprf, no more victim blaming, less useless homework, and less pandering to parents and backing down on your claims, thanks** This is important because more and more students are feeling unsafe and like they can't go to adults for help.

Critical difference

One of the Thoughtexchange features is that it assesses whether there are any significant areas of disagreement among respondents who have tended to rank other thoughts similarly. Here is the most notable difference found:

Side A/B - Common, highly rated thoughts

- **Classmates can't connect over Zoom.** Without in person conversation in/around class, there's not really ways to connect with classmates. Breakout rooms don't give the same experience.
- **Don't assign homework on "off days."** Some teachers are now assigning double the homework because there are multiple days between classes. This is extremely stressful for students.
- **As a student of OPRF these parents should not be allowed to post on this thought board.** They complain enough on facebook how about you let our voices be actually heard and create change that would make your student body happy. *[Note: The link to the Thoughtexchange was sent only to students, not to parents or staff.]*

Side A - 129 highly rated responses that were given low rankings by Side B

- **My classmates are very cool and nice.** Because they are cool and nice.
- **The teachers are fun and nice. The students are cool. Teachers are patient and available to help. They are quick with staying up to date on assignment**
- **I think that breakout rooms have been working well to both keep students engaged & build better connections.** By letting students work or talk together in breakout rooms, similar to how they would in-person at school, I believe that time in class is well spent.
- **I think it's going fine.**
- **The zoom calls are working well. Relationships with teachers seem to be coming along.**
- **Commenting on teacher and student flipgrids.** It feels like a real interaction and really helps me to get to know my classmates and teachers, and vice versa.
- **I like how we use streaming platforms.** Like we use Zoom and Google Meet in order to better connect with our teachers and classmates.
- **I believe that about everything is going great as it could be considering the circumstances.** This is important because it is necessary that we still learn all that we can during this time.
- **More group projects.** Because you can connect more with many people in the class.
- **Zoom calls are working well.** Teachers are able to communicate easily.

Side B - 69 highly rated responses that were given low rankings by Side A

- **We should stop doing breakout rooms. They are glitchy, and no one ever talks.** I have spoken to friends who have the same experience as me, where we have to run the whole meeting.
- **i think the assignments are fine i just don't think zoom calls should be mandatory.** Because, although it may seem like people are more engaged, they lose interest and determination to do work because they can't even focus in class.
- **There is no break, I start school at 9 and end at 2:30 everyday.** Everyday is really tiring there is no time I can actually take to myself and rejuvenate. It's so tedious and tiring.

Thank you!

We appreciate all who participated in this Thoughtexchange. The results will help inform administrators and teachers about how we can improve the process of ensuring our students are feeling connected to their teachers and classmates.